We found that about 17 percent of third-graders have changed schools frequently, that is, have attended three or more schools since the beginning of first grade. About one-quarter, or 24 percent, of third-graders have attended two schools; the remaining 59 percent of third-graders have remained in the same school since first grade.

INNER CITY AND LOW-INCOME CHILDREN MUCH MORE LIKELY TO CHANGE SCHOOLS FREQUENTLY

Inner city children are much more likely to change schools frequently, on average, than those in rural or suburban areas or in small cities or towns. One-fourth of third-graders in inner city schools have changed schools frequently, that is, have attended three or more schools since first grade. In comparison, only about one-seventh of children from rural or suburban areas or from small cities or towns have changed schools frequently.

Children from low-income families are more likely to change schools frequently than those from higher income families. Among children in families with annual incomes below $10,000, 30 percent have changed schools frequently, compared with 8 percent of children in families with incomes of $50,000 or more. Overall, the percentage of children who change schools frequently decreases as income increases.

NATIVE AMERICAN, BLACK, HISPANIC, MIGRANT, AND LEP CHILDREN MORE LIKELY TO CHANGE SCHOOLS FREQUENTLY

Native American, black, and Hispanic children are more likely to change schools frequently than Asian or white children. However, these differences are less related to race or ethnicity than to differences in income and, consequently, homeownership versus renter status: renters tend to move much more frequently than homeowners. When we examined 1990 Current Population Survey data reported by the Bureau of the Census, race or ethnic differences in mobility largely disappeared after considering homeownership versus renter status.

Migrant and limited English proficient (LEP) children are much more likely to change schools frequently than all children. About 40 percent of migrant children and 34 percent of LEP children change schools frequently, in comparison with 17 percent of all children. In addition, compared with 59 percent of all children, a smaller percentage of migrant and LEP children have never changed schools—28 and 38 percent, respectively.

Teachers reported that children who change schools frequently, compared with those who have never changed schools, are much more likely to have problems related to nutrition or health and hygiene. Among children who change schools frequently, 10 percent are reported to have nutrition problems, compared with about 3 percent of children who have never changed schools. Similarly, teachers report that 20 percent of children who change schools frequently have health and hygiene problems, compared with 8 percent of children who have never changed schools.

For all children, those who have changed schools frequently are more than twice as likely to repeat a grade as those who have never changed schools. Among children who change schools frequently, about 20 percent repeat a grade; in contrast, among children who have never changed schools, about 8 percent repeat a grade.

Children who change schools frequently are less likely to receive educational support from federal programs than those who have never changed schools. For example, migrant children who change schools frequently are less likely to receive migrant education services than those who have never changed schools. In addition, low-achieving children who change schools frequently are less likely to get Chapter 1 services than those low-achieving children who have never changed schools; this is true for children achieving below grade level in math as well as reading.

[From the CATALYST, Cleveland, Mar./Apr. 2001]

MOBILE STUDENTS SCORE LOWER ON STATE TEST

(By Sandra Clark)

Cleveland 4th-graders who changed schools one or more times during the school year scored lower than their stable classmates on all five sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test, according to a CATALYST analysis of test scores from 1997 to 1999.

On average, mobile students scored 5.12 points below their more stable counterparts. The largest spread between the two was in math and science. The smallest gap was in reading.

The analysis of test scores of 16,278 students, 1,914 of whom changed schools at least once during the school year, was conducted for *CATALYST* by Joshua G. Bagaka's, assistant professor of educational research and statistics at Cleveland State University.

''Across all five parts of the Ohio 4th- and 6th-grade proficiency test, mobile students consistently received lower scores than their stable counterparts,'' Bagaka's says.

''I don't think we need to down play the role of mobility here,'' Bagaka's says. ''Schools should find ways of giving mobile kids special attention because they are at risk of failing.''

Bagaka's analysis also showed that the test scores of mobile students suffered regardless of the students' family income or whether they live with one or both parents.

The analysis also shows: The achievement gap between stable and mobile students by income is often widest for mobile students who pay full price for lunch and smallest for students on free lunch. In many areas, poor mobile students do better than well-off mobile students. (See chart page 5.)

Similar conclusions can be drawn when comparing students from single-parent and two-parent homes. Mobile students from single-parent homes often do just as well as mobile students from two-parent homes. (See chart page 5.)

Mobility refers to students who change schools one or more times during an academic year. Students change schools frequently due to school choice, family moves, poverty, hopelessness, changes in child custody and other problems.

Cleveland's mobility rate has fallen from 19.5 percent in 1998 and 1999 to 15.8 percent in 1999 due in part to the end of desegregation, says Peter A. Robertson, Cleveland Municipal School District's executive director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.

Individually, however, high-poverty elementary schools such as Willow, East Clark, Bolton and George Washington Carver reported rates nearing 30 percent during the period.

Based on student demographics and test scores from 1997 through 1999, the analysis indicated an achievement gap that varied little even as the test changed in difficulty during the period.

The highest achievement gaps in math and science were 7.5 points and 9.2 points, respectively. The average gap in reading was 3.5 points. Reading is something children can learn at home, says Russell W. Rumberger, education professor at University of California, Santa Barbara. Families rely on schools to teach math and science, which is why the achievement gap in those subjects is largest, Rumberger says.

CATALYST'S findings come as no surprise to Robertson. The district has not targeted mobile students for any special help, Robertson says. However, he adds that districtwide initiatives such as establishing standards and periodically assessing students' strengths and weaknesses should help them. (See story page 9.)

''Beyond that,'' Robertson says, ''we are trying to make sure they have access to good teaching and what we need to do for all kids.''

Cleveland findings reflect studies done elsewhere that linked student mobility to lower achievement.

For example, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Family Housing Fund and other groups studied mobile students in the city. The year-long study, called the Kids Mobility Project, found that students who moved three or more times earned reading scores that were half that of students who stayed put.

David Kerbow, a University of Chicago researcher who has studied mobility in Chicago Public Schools, says constant movement slows the learning pace for not only mobile students but also their stable classmates. An analysis of math in highly mobile classrooms shows teachers frequently stop and start to integrate new students with varying achievement levels into the class, Kerbow says. Introduction of new material slows as the teacher begins keeping lessons basic. And, over time, students in highly mobile schools get instruction that is about a year behind that of students in more stable schools, Kerbow reports.

MILES PARK FINDS ANSWERS

(By Sandra Clark)

A tour of Miles Park Elementary School offers a snapshot of mobility—its causes, its impact and even a way to minimize its harm.

Any staff member can guide the tour. They all have stories.

Clerk Ella Kirtley can explain what a task it is to keep pace with the rapid student turnover. Librarian Jeanne Irvin says she spends countless hours and dollars retrieving books from students who leave. Second-grade teacher Jane E. Rodgers can demonstrate how she tries to teach an ever-changing class.

The Cleveland Municipal School District, like most in the country, has no official policy for mitigating the impact of mobility. The district has been pushing schools to improve proficiency test scores without taking mobility and its drag on achievement into account, Miles Park Principal William J. Bauer says. So the school struck out on its own, making the needs of mobile students a schoolwide focus.

''The area superintendent says 'You did good [with proficiencies] last year. How much are you going to improve this year?' '' Bauer says. ''There's a new student, there's a new student, there's a new student with grades lower than an LD [Learning Disabled] student. You're a teacher and you're responsible for increasing scores every year.''

The staff is fluent in mobility because enrollment shifts dramatically here. The school's 1999 mobility rate, the most recent available, of 14.7 percent is below the district average for elementary schools, about 16 percent.

Yet, staff sees a constant churning of students in and out of the school. To date, the school's enrollment shifted from 530 students, to 510 and then 571 for a total change of 81. That means about four whole classrooms full of kids have come and gone this school year. The impact the movement has on learning at the school is huge, Bauer says.

Mobility's influence on behavior and achievement becomes clear one day when